

TOP SECRET

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Briefing by

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for the

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THE NORTH KOREAN THREAT

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[Attached to State memo from Lyne for HAK, 4 Mar. 1970]

TOP SECRET

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DCI BRIEFING FOR
4 March NSC MEETING

THE NORTH KOREAN THREAT

I. Mr. President, since I last reported to the National Security Council about North Korea on August 14, the principal change in the information available to us has been confirmation that North Korea in the course of 1969 has retrenched substantially in its unconventional warfare threat.

A. I believe it would be more useful to begin this briefing, however, with a summary of the conventional military threat posed by North Korea, and then to discuss the scope of the Communists' unconventional warfare, and the ability of the South Koreans to deal with it.

North Korean Military

II. Premier Kim Il-song is proud of his armed forces, and has spared no effort to achieve his publicly announced intention "to convert the whole country into a military fortress."

A. He does have an impressive military establishment, and appears determined to keep on

TOP SECRET

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improving it. The air force and navy received a substantial amount of modern equipment from the Soviet Union between 1966 and 1968, but with few exceptions the ground forces are generally using Soviet-designed weapons of the early Fifties.

III. These ground forces total about 25 infantry divisions or division equivalents. Fourteen of these divisions--about 130,000 men--remain deployed in strong defensive positions facing the Demilitarized Zone. There are a few other forces along each coast.

- A. Recent information indicates that North Korea is now making some reductions in the size of its ground forces, which we estimated at 350,000 last August.
- B. The ROK forces, totaling 567,000, have more total manpower, even with 50,000 men currently in Vietnam.
- C. We believe that the North Koreans would have trouble mounting sustained offensive operations because of a shortage of vehicles,

TOP SECRET

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TOP SECRET

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ground support equipment, and fuel.

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- A. North Korea now has about 500 tactical aircraft. Some 425 of these are jet fighters, but 75 or so are used mainly for training or reconnaissance. On the other hand, more than 85 are MIG-21s, most of which have been delivered by the Soviet Union since late 1967. The great majority of North Korea's fighter aircraft--about 340--are still the older, subsonic MIG 17s and 15s. These, in addition to being the primary ground attack fighters, would also have to be used for most of the fighter air defense work.
- B. The remainder of the North Korean inventory of tactical aircraft consists of some 70 to

TOP SECRET

25X1

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80 IL-28 jet light bombers, which give the North an offensive capability that the South Koreans cannot match.

C. Pyongyang has continued to train the crews of its 16 to 18 SA-2 surface-to-air missile battalions. The North Koreans now have about as many alternate sites as occupied ones.

V. The North Korean Navy has 14 guided-missile patrol boats and 4 "W" class submarines, but is still mainly a coastal defense force.

A. There is also an assortment of patrol escorts, torpedo boats, and motor gunboats.

VI. This military establishment represents a significant proportion of the country's economic effort, and has been a major factor in its poor economic performance by comparison with South Korea. The percent of GNP devoted to the military continues to be one of the highest--if not the highest--of any country in the world.

A. We still estimate that about 20 percent of all able-bodied males between 15 and 49 years of age are in uniform, adding to the already acute labor shortage.

TOP SECRET

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VII. In spite of this impressive military establishment, we continue to

believe

that under present circumstances, North Korea does not intend to invade South Korea, nor is it deliberately trying to provoke South Korea or the United States into a resumption of major hostilities.

A. Moreover, although we estimate that North Korean forces could defend the country against a South Korean attack, they would need considerable outside support to mount sustained offensive operations.

VIII. It ^(does not appear) likely that either the USSR or Communist China would provide encouragement and support for a North Korean attack.

[A. ~~If hostilities were initiated, however, and China felt compelled to intervene in defense of North Korea, it could probably maintain in Korea some 650,000 men in 34 ground divisions. This level of support, however, would~~

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TOP SECRET

~~denude Chinese defenses elsewhere and would require a major redeployment of forces extending over several months.~~

- B. ~~Similarly, by committing all air forces in the Peking and Shenyang Air Districts, China could in theory put as many as 1,500 aircraft into combat over Korea. This would also require a major force redeployment and, furthermore, the crews of only about 200 of these aircraft have been trained for offensive operations.~~

Unconventional Warfare

IX. North Korea in 1966 had embarked on a campaign of armed harassment and terrorism against the South described as a "revolutionary struggle," which was to pave the way for reunification of Korea.

- A. The Communists spoke of their campaign in terms usually applied to classic guerrilla warfare, although they had no potential for

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TOP SECRET

TOP SECRET

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such a war in the South, and encountered total failure in their efforts to develop one.

B. In the absence of a sympathetic environment-- in the words of Mao Tse-tung's aphorism, "the "water" in which their guerrilla "fish" could swim--the North Koreans had to rely instead on DMZ incidents and ambushes, sabotage, infiltration, and an occasional large-scale raid with troops specially trained for unconventional warfare.

C. Their objectives were threefold:

1. In South Korea, they wanted to disrupt public order, destroy confidence in the government, force the diversion of men and resources from the growing civilian economy, and generate friction between Seoul and Washington.
2. The purpose in North Korea itself was to stir the people to greater contributions to the economy, and to solidify Kim Il-song's political position.
3. As regards the United States, the pressure of unconventional warfare was

TOP SECRET

25X1

TOP SECRET

supposed to add to the dissatisfaction over military commitments in Asia, and ultimately to bring about a reduction of American commitment and support.

X. These North Korean objectives undoubtedly are still valid, and the policy of "revolutionary struggle" persists, but in the course of 1969 the Communists--still unable to find a "revolution" in the South--virtually suspended their previous efforts to implant one from the North by violence.

A. The North Korean regime drastically changed the tactics of its subversion program, if not the strategy. The calculated use of steady paramilitary pressure, a key element in the subversion program from 1966 through 1968, has been absent since the beginning of 1969.

1. North Korean military harassment along the Demilitarized Zone last year was at the lowest level since 1966. Only 98 incidents were recorded, compared with 542 in 1968 and 445 in 1967.

TOP SECRET

TOP SECRET

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2. In the interior of South Korea, only 36 incidents were recorded, compared with 219 in 1968.
3. The type of activity also changed radically, with North Korean agents directing their activity primarily at recruitment, propaganda, and intelligence collection.

~~B. The decision to change tactics probably was made before January 1969; at that time, North Korean paramilitary and reconnaissance units were already reducing personnel substantially.~~

- ~~1. The so-called "reconnaissance units" assigned to each army group along the Demilitarized Zone reportedly lost almost two-thirds of their 1968 personnel strength.~~
- ~~2. Personnel reductions also probably occurred in the elite 124th Army Unit, which was responsible for the assassination attempt against President Pak in January 1968, and the infiltration of 120 guerrillas on South Korea's east~~

TOP SECRET

TOP SECRET

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~~coast in November 1968. This unit under~~
took no missions in the interior of
South Korea in 1969, [redacted]

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C. It seems most likely that Premier Kim Il-song judged that the unsuccessful violent operations of the preceding year were not helping to achieve his goal of unification of the Korean peninsula.

1. Kim apparently had believed that North Korean infiltrators could brew rebellion in the villages of the South, and create a revolutionary atmosphere which the South Korean peasants would welcome.
2. Instead, the military pressure strengthened President Pak's position in the ruling party and throughout South Korea, as the government effectively allayed popular concern over the North Korean threat.
3. In addition, North Korean brinksmanship ~~was not building up concerted worldwide~~

TOP SECRET

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TOP SECRET

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~~pressure on the U.S. to retrench its
forces and withdraw from Korea.~~

D. Although it is clear that Kim Il-song has not renounced the use of force in his grand strategy for unification, the changes of the subversion program in 1969 suggest that, under present conditions, violence will be a minor element.

1. Pyongyang's diplomats are working hard, particularly in Africa and Asia, to erode the two-to-one edge in international acceptance presently held by South Korea.
2. These efforts emphasize the "Korean-ness" of the northern regime and its "legitimate" national desire for a united country, a desire frustrated only by the presence of the U.S. occupation force in the South.

XI. The attainment of Kim Il-song's goals in the foreseeable future will continue to depend much more on international developments than on his own plans and efforts.

TOP SECRET

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A. Kim seems to understand this, and is sticking to capitalizing on any favorable turn of events. He is not now trying to follow a deliberate timetable.

B. We cannot tell how long the present low-keyed program will continue, but the tactical change in 1969 is a good reminder that Kim is a calculating gambler, well aware of the necessity for changing tactics when the returns are low or the risks too high.

South Korean Counterinsurgency

XII. The South Korean Government now is better prepared to respond to North Korean subversion than at any other time in its history. A comprehensive counter-infiltration system has been developed, implemented, and successfully tested.

A. At the national level, there is a cabinet-level coordinating committee chaired by the Prime Minister. [REDACTED]

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TOP SECRET

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D. A major factor in the success of the counter-insurgency structure is the widespread dislike of the Kim Il-song regime among South Korean adults, who have bitter memories of the Korean War.

1. In addition there are broad anti-Communist laws, rigidly enforced. Liberal cash rewards are given to those who assist the authorities.
2. Whatever the motive, over the past three years, South Koreans seem generally to have informed the authorities following contacts with infiltrators.

TOP SECRET

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